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PRESS STATEMENT BY THE ACTING PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF ZIMBABWE AND MINISTER OF HEALTH AND CHILD CARE, HONOURABLE GENERAL (RETIRED) DR. C. G. D. N. CHIWENGA 'GCZM', ON THE OCCASION OF THE WORLD CANCER DAY COMMEMORATIONS, TO BE HELD ON 04 FEBRUARY 2021

SALUTATION

- My fellow Citizens;
- Development Partners;
- World Health Organisation Representative: **Dr. Alex GASASIRA**
- Ministry of Health and Child Care Officials here-present;
- Head Radiotherapy Department: **Dr. N. Ndlovu**
- Director Non Communicable Diseases: **Dr. W. NYAMAYARO**
- Colleagues;
- Ladies and Gentlemen;
- Members of the Press;

Let me take this opportunity to extend my warm greetings and wish you all a healthy well-being, particularly so, in this **COVID 19** environment. The pandemic has continued to

claim a huge toll of casualties, with tectonic effects on global security. The onset of **CORONA Virus** on the continent of Africa was gradual. However, the emergence of new strains of the deadly **CORONA Virus** accelerated the progression of a **second wave** at the close of year **2020** and beginning of year **2021**.'

Consequently, an upward trend in **Confirmed Cases**, **Active Cases** and **Deaths** were recorded in Zimbabwe. In response to the growing threat to Public Health, the Government of Zimbabwe forged synergies with Friendly States, Civil Society Organisations, Strategic Partners, Corporates and the generality of our Zimbabweans to combat the pandemic. We welcome and are very grateful to the **Peoples' Republic of China** for their donation of the **COVID 19 Vaccine** to Zimbabwe. The landmark gesture will achieve a milestone in combatting the pandemic. Furthermore, the Government of the Republic of Zimbabwe embarked on a deliberate programme to acquire more COVID 19 Vaccines. My fellow Zimbabweans, **let me also reiterate that the Government of Zimbabwe will rollout COVID 19 Vaccines for free**, to all our citizens who may wish to be vaccinated. The policy is inspired by humane morals that, ***'Life should not be bought.'***

While the nation is putting up a spirited fight against **COVID 19**, citizens and stakeholders are encouraged to be mindful of the threat posed by Non-**Communicable Diseases** like **Cancer**, **Diabetes**, **HIV (AIDS)**, **Hypertension** and other chronic health conditions or injuries. It is sad to note that patients beset with immuno-suppression (a condition caused by **Non Communicable Diseases**) are more susceptible to **COVID-19**. According to the World Health Organisation, ***cancer is the 'second leading cause of worldwide deaths,'*** only surpassed by **COVID-19**, which recently doubled the casualty rate.

The origins of **cancer** ***(Gomarara, Imvukuzane)*** can be retraced to about **250 million years ago.** The term which means '***out-of-control growth of abnormal cells,***' was credited to **Hippocrates (460-370 BC),** a Greek Physician who used the terms, '**carcinos** or **carcinomas'** to refer to **cancer.** A Roman Physician called **Celsus (28-50 BC)** later translated the word **carcinomas** to '**cancer**,' a **Latin** word for a **crab,** while another Greek Physician, **Galen (130 - 200 AD),** used the word, '**Oncos'** to describe **tumours** or **swellings**. Nowadays, the term describes **Cancer Specialists**, who are known as **Oncologists**.

According to the **World Health Organisation**, **cancer** caused **nine point six (9,6) million** deaths in the world in year **2018**. At least **one (01)** out of **six (06) deaths** was caused by **cancer**, with **seventy (70) percent** cancer deaths occurring in low and middle-income countries. According to the **Cancer Registry (2016)**, a total of **two thousand seven hundred and fifty one (2 751)** people died of **cancer** in Zimbabwe. The threat requires humankind to raise ***awareness of cancer*** and advocate for its ***prevention***, ***detection*** and ***treatment***. Hence, the **4th** of **February** of every year**,** was set aside for the **World Cancer Day Commemorations.**

This year's event is running under the theme, ***"I am and I will campaign for Prevention, Detection and Treatment of Cancer."*** The causes of **cancer** cover a wide gamut, spanning from:

- Air Pollution.
- Overweight/Obesity.
- Genetic/Hereditary.
- Lack of physical activity.
- Alcohol use.
- Unhealthy diet without vegetable or fruit intake.
- Sexually transmitted **Human Papilloma Virus.**

- Ultra-Violet Radiation.
- Tobacco and cigarettes.
- Hepatitis or carcinogenic infection.
- Advanced age.

Modification or avoidance of key risk factors can reduce the burden of cancer. Citizens are encouraged to forego bad habits and celebrate the longevity of their God-given lives.

The prevalence of **cancer** foregrounded the requirement for nations to set up robust and efficient healthcare systems. The above need dovetails with my Ministry's policies of **restructuring** and **automation of health care service delivery**. The initiatives will improve accessibility to treatment in both **urban** and **outlying areas.** In order to mitigate the effects of **Non Communicable Diseases**, my Ministry dedicated a whole Directorate to raise ***awareness, prevent***, ***detect*** and ***treat*** *these epidemics.*

Hitherto, commendable strides have been made towards addressing the burden of **Cancer** in Zimbabwe. These include:

- **Training of Oncologists** and **Oncology Nurses** in Zimbabwe at the Parirenyatwa School of Nursing and College of Health Sciences.

- **Mass Immunisation Program for Human Papilloma Virus** (HPV), targeting girls aged between **10-14 years** to protect them against development of **Cervical Cancer**.

- **Screening programs for Cervical Cancer** up to District Health Facility level. In year 2020, **one hundred and ten thousand six hundred and eighty-six (110 686)** women were screened for Cervical Cancer. Out of the **five thousand eight hundred and eighty-three (5**

883) who tested positive, **four thousand five hundred and sixty-one (4 561)** were treated. The treatment rate stood at **seventy-seven point five (77.5) percent**.

- Establishment of a **Cancer Registry**, which is located at Parirenyatwa Group of Hospital. The institution is considered as one of the best in Africa in terms of collecting data for the burden of cancer.

- Availability of **Radiotherapy Treatment Facilities** at Parirenyatwa Group of Hospitals and Mpilo Hospital.

- **Procurement of essential cancer medicines** through NatPharm.

- **Roll out of the Palliative Care Program to health facilities** to ensure cancer patients have access to pain management, counselling and support services up to the rural health facility level.

- **Inclusion of Screening tools for Cervical Cancer, Breast Cancer** and **Prostate Cancer** in the **electronic Health Records** to ensure robust follow up of cancer patients.

- My Ministry is also updating the **Zimbabwe Cancer Prevention and Control Strategy,** to make it mandatory for citizens to be screened for **cancer** in certain age groups. For example, Prostate Cancer for men aged **forty (40)** and above.

My Ministry recognises all stakeholders and health care staff who worked tirelessly towards the successful execution of Cancer programs in Zimbabwe. Admittedly, more effort is still required to ensure that citizens have access to world class cancer care. Some of the deficit areas include:

- Decentralisation of specialist oncology services to district hospital level.

- Increased cancer awareness campaigns targeted at the public focussing on early detection and prevention.

- Access to screening for other cancers such as Prostate Cancer Screening for men.

- Inclusion of cancer in the package for essential services that can be accessed at the various levels of health care.

- Establishment of state-of-the-art health facilities that provide world class cancer screening and treatment services.

- Research in the use of Traditional Medicines in cancer management.

Let me acknowledge that ***cancer is one of the leading causes of death in Zimbabwe*** and therefore, citizens must come together and fight the epidemic. All of us must reflect individual commitment that resonates with this year's theme which is ***"I am and I will campaign for Prevention, Detection and Treatment of Cancer."*** It is therefore prudent for all of us to adopt healthy lifestyles. I would like to thank the community for being supportive of this program and look forward to your continued participation."

This year's ***Annual Cancer Awareness and Screening Campaign*** is also hereby launched!

I thank you!